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FM AMEMBASSY BANGUI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0860
INFO RHMFISS/AFRICOM
RUEHBZ/AMEMBASSY BRAZZAVILLE PRIORITY 0137
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA PRIORITY 0073
RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 0107
RUEHKB/AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY 0238
RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY 0249
RUEHLC/AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE PRIORITY 0151
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0099
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY 0134
RUEHNP/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA PRIORITY 0425
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0409
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY 0027
RUEHYD/AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PRIORITY 0403
RUEHGI/AMEMBASSY BANGUI 1076

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BANGUI 000060

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/C SSARDAR, MASHRAF, SLOPEZ, KWYCOFF
PARIS FOR RKANEDA
LONDON FOR FLORD
AFRICOM FOR KOCH

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CT](#)

SUBJECT: RIOTS IN BANGUI: TENSIONS BOIL OVER AFTER THE MURDER OF A
POLICE CHIEF BY THE PRESIDENTIAL GUARD

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: During the evening of March 5, 2009 a large riot broke out in the Miskine neighborhood of Bangui. The protesters were reacting to the severe assault on a police officer and respected member of the community by three members of the Presidential Guard. From approximately 7pm until 6am on the 6th gun shots could be heard in the area as Police, Gendarmes and the Presidential Guard reacted to the demonstration. The events hindered access to the Mpoko airport, but did not stop the weekly flight to Paris from leaving. Reports state that eight civilians have been wounded by stray bullets and three soldiers were taken to the hospital after being pelted by objects thrown from the crowd. The police officer was reported to have died on the morning of the March 6 and rioting has recommenced. Post will update as more information arrives. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) The chief of police of the town of Dekoa (on the road to Ndele in the north), Mr. Sama, was confronted by three members of the Presidential Guard at 6pm on March 5 for carrying a pistol. Though he was carrying the weapon lawfully, a report had been made that Mr. Sama was not the policeman but a possible rebel. The confronting soldiers were led by Lt. Gbangouma, a notorious member of the Presidential Guard and a highly divisive figure in Bangui. (See CAR Human Rights Reports 2007 and 2008).

A dispute ensued and the three soldiers beat Mr. Sama unconscious before taking him to the hospital. Word of the assault and possible death of Mr. Sama spread quickly and youths from the neighborhood blocked the main road and began burning tires. The first of the Police, Gendarmes and Presidential Guard arrived at 8PM to reestablish order and were confronted by a reported 2,000-4,000 people. Reports are that the crowd was chanting "We want to die" in defiance of the police and began singing the Central African national anthem. A second wave of soldiers arrived, some in uniform and some not, and shots were fired. All reports are that the gunfire was directed skywards in an effort to disperse the crowd but reportedly eight people were struck by stray bullets. An Embassy LES who lives near the neighborhood observed one wounded person. Though sporadic gunfire was heard until 6AM, the majority of protesters were off the street by approximately 10PM.

¶3. (SBU) POLOFF visited the site at 9AM on March 6. Burn marks

were still clearly evident on the street and the odor of burned rubber still pungent, yet life had returned to normal. Witnesses confirmed newspaper reports and also added that a local cell phone store had been looted by plain clothed soldiers who are known to be Presidential Guardsmen. Onlookers were clearly still agitated, yet POLOFF witnessed a pickup truck with 5 policemen drive down the main street without incident.

14. (U) Post has since learned that the police chief has died of his wounds and rioting has recommenced. Outside of the city morgue, youths began to burn tires and block the road but have been dispersed by the police and the Presidential Guard. The rioting has started anew in Miskine where demonstrators are demanding the president turn over Lt. Gbangouma. Large amounts of gunfire are reported and Post will detail events as they develop. The European Commission has just issued an urgent warning to its employees to avoid the area. Similarly, Post notified AmCits by Warden Message both on the night of the 5th and the morning of the 6th after rioting resumed.

14. (SBU) COMMENT: Miskine is a poor neighborhood of mixed ethnicity and religion that was subject recently to a police operation against possible rebel forces in Bangui. Post believes that economic hardship in combination with frustration about the impunity of the Presidential Guard, and in particular Lt. Gbangouma, are the main drivers of this event. Thus, though there are no direct ties to the recent burning of a police station in January 2009, there is clearly a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the forces of order and the government. There have been other instances of mob reaction to the malfeasance of outsiders in Miskine (Comment: in October 2008, a Malian citizen killed his wife, a resident of the neighborhood

BANGUI 00000060 002 OF 002

and a similar riot ensued. The riot was only ended when a member of the Presidential Guard summarily executed the accused murderer. End comment). Last month there was an instance of tire burning in the nearby community of Bimbo, to the South of Bangui, in reaction to the lack of electricity. It is much too early to make any definitive statements, but AmEmbassy Bangui notes the slow increase in demonstrations of public dissatisfaction with the deficiency of public services, the lack of security, and the impunity with which the forces of "law and order", especially the presidential guard, commit crimes. We continue to follow events closely and make preparations for various contingencies. END COMMENT
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